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BOOK REVIEWS

IN CHARGE OF

M. E. CAMERON



ENCYCLOPÆDIA OF HOUSEHOLD ECONOMY. By Emily Holt. New York: Phillips & Co., publishers.

As a curiosity this book is recommended to searchers after novelty in literature. Perhaps its appearance is due to the 1830 revival, but many of its features go a hundred years back of that date. There is much that is excellent and of practical value in the book, though most of it seems to be written for pioneer or frontier life, where time has little or no value so long as seasons are duly observed and planting is done in the spring and reaping in the autumn. There is plumbing after Waring; there are the latest fads in electric lighting; the treatment of a sick cow; there is a list of insecticides wherein the bed-bug is ignored—probably unknown; there is a chapter on “Healing Simples.” At first glance one takes exception to the noun in the title and a second look crosses out the adjective. They suggest aggravation rather than healing, and very active poisons seem miscalled simples.

The instruction in sewing one feels to be inadequate. The instructor warns against the sewing-machine, which is liable to get moody and indulge in vagaries, is an unreliable aid and not to be depended upon. But it is the chapter on nursing that gives one a desire to chew long on the cud of reflection. The chapter opens:

“Since the trained nurse is a luxury of woe beyond the reach of so many of us, it is worth while to set down some things possible to any person of ordinary intelligence, which, faithfully followed, will make her absence less keenly felt.” This sounds sarcastic, but may not be so. Some of the things set down are the essentials that every nurse carries away from her training-school, but there are other things set down that remind us of the saying, “A little learning is a dangerous thing.”

THE LIFE-WORK OF GEORGE FREDERICK WATTS, R.A. By Hugh MacMillan, D.D.; LL.D., F.R.S.E., F.S.A. (Scot.). London: J. M. Dent & Co.; New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., publishers.

Perhaps it is hardly necessary to call to the attention of the reader any one number of the series of “Temple Biographies,” since they claim so much well-deserved popularity; yet this one number in particular has in it so much that is applicable for instruction and inspiration that one is constrained to add one word more in praise of Dr. MacMillan’s “Life-Work of George Frederick Watts.” It seems to appeal to our own profession in a way more than to any other class of the general reading public. The nature of our calling as nurses makes it impossible to escape from dwelling much in thought on the mystery of human life, on its spiritual significance, on the inscrutable design which ordered the laws which govern human life. Naturally, when we find one in the higher intellectual calling who makes his life-work the study of these questions we are

eager to look through his eyes and see with his vision. To do so in this case seems impossible, seeing that almost none of Watts's pictures are to be seen on this side of the Atlantic; but Dr. MacMillan's book overcomes this serious obstacle for us in some measure, for it is a translation in some sort, or, as he himself calls it, "a literary interpretation of what Watts with larger, other eyes than ours has seen in nature poetry, and myth, and in human character. We may not be allowed to see these pictures, but through Dr. MacMillan's presentation we may know the thought which Watts expressed in each, thus satisfying the spirit, even if the eye is cheated. There is very little of a personal nature in the book—it is concerned more with the work than the worker; yet there are some interesting notes on the personal habits of this great man which it were well to give a thought to. Naturally of a rather delicate constitution, he has lived longer than many men, and worked harder than most. His own words are quoted in the following rule: "I have never smoked. Greater things were done in the world, immeasurably greater, before tobacco was discovered, than have ever been done since. The cigarette is the handmaid of idleness. Possibly it may be a sedative to overwrought nerves; but overwrought nerves in themselves are things that ought not to be. Of wine I have taken very little. In my earliest years I used to take a little, but for a long time I have never touched any form of alcohol. At meals I never drink anything, not even water. Tea, yes, in moderation. And so with regard to food. I have been compelled to eat moderately and of simple fare; to go to bed early, nine o'clock for the most part; to rise with the sun; to avoid fatigue, and to enjoy plenty of fresh air." We are told of his unremitting labor, his splendid independence, that scorned to work for money only; of his indifference to popularity, that he twice refused a baronetcy, preferring as his only title that conferred by a friend, "The Painter of Eternal Truths." In this country we know him by those beautiful photographs of his portraits which may be seen at galleries like Hegger's, Keppel's, or Wunderlich's; there too may be seen photographs of some of his other pictures. Dr. MacMillan calls our attention to the gradual working through different stages of art. "His apprenticeship, as it were, to portrait painting qualified him for the representation of all that was noblest and most spiritual in the human face, and from thence to the realization of the ideal qualities and abstract virtues." And of landscape: "He wanted to make us see the glory of the grass, and the splendor of the flower, in order that we might see the surpassing glory of things which eye hath not seen in the visions of the soul." After the chapter on the "Greek Myths" comes "Scenes and Incidents from Hebrew Story," of which the author writes: "Very precious is the group of pictures which illustrate the Hebrew story, and form a special gallery of their own, which, if Watts had done nothing else, would have conferred immortality upon him. Few have drunk deeper of the spirit of Sacred Scripture than he has done or assimilated its teachings more thoroughly. "The series may be said to commence with the paintings which illustrate the birth, temptation, and repentance of Eve." The first of these three, wherein "Watts wishes to show what is still constantly taking place, the awakening of her (woman) from the sleep of ignorance and contented inferiority to the consciousness of her true nature and power. The proper function and mission of woman is one of the greatest questions of the age." Following the chapter on Hebrew story comes that on "Allegories," followed in its turn by "Realism." One picture in the latter we note, "The Shuddering Angel." "The angel is represented with black bands of mourning upon his wrists, covering

his face with his hands, in great distress, as he bends over an altar on which lie the feathers and wings of birds which have been stripped off to adorn the bonnets of fashionable women. Those who know how much havoc this monstrous caprice of fashion has wrought amongst the most beautiful of God's creatures cannot but be filled with indignation when they gaze upon this picture. Thousands who worship at the altar of God do despite in this manner to the fair humanities of the blessed religion which teaches that the Father of all marks the fall of every sparrow to the ground. And the altar of fashion at which they bend the knee is the altar of Moloch stained with innocent blood."

In the chapter, "The Cycle of Death," we reach the climax of Watts's greatness, and realize in a way that nothing is done at random, that if in the beginning the great painter had not dared to plan, still, he worked towards the goal which he has in so great a measure achieved. He has made good his motto, "the utmost for the highest." "All these pictures shadow forth, in expressive symbols, the religion of Watts; his belief in the moral government of the universe; his serene faith that all things come through a Divine ordering and in conformity to a Divine plan; his artistic solution of the great problems of sin and life and death and judgment, of the ruin, and of the redemption of the world."

Watts has used his pen as well as his brush. A quotation is given from an article contributed by him to the *Nineteenth Century Review* of 1883, wherein he remonstrates against some of the monstrous fashions of that time. Then, as now, women appeared to believe that natural beauties must be perverted to be acceptable to popular taste. The shape and size of the head must be made abnormal; the hand, the foot, and the waist must be pinched; at which he cries out in horror, pointing out that women in middle life lose their abnormal height by a collapse of the muscles which support the spine, these muscles becoming atrophied by the constant binding of tight corsets. This may seem out of place, but it is very characteristic of the man. The common things that others overlooked came in for his attention, the sorrows of the poor, the cruelties to the lower animals, the want of appreciation for homely virtues and humble heroes, were all too great for him to pass unnoticed.

The greatness of the subject assures the great fascination of Dr. MacMillan's book; yet we lay it down with the conviction that his perception must have been peculiarly sensitive or that he must have been on very happily intimate terms with the painter, since the final revision of the book by Mr. and Mrs. Watts would certainly have corrected any misinterpretation. One feels that Dr. MacMillan's death, announced by the editor's note at the end of the book, has removed one from whom we would gladly have heard more. We cannot but feel that no one ever met Death on more friendly terms, for, like Watts, he regarded death as a natural episode in life, not at all affecting one's real existence, but merely the closing event of one stage of it.